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SUBJECT: MEDIA VIEW - SURINAME FACES ITS TROUBLED PAST

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REFTEL: 05 PARAMARIBO 000575

1) (U) SUMMARY: The following editorial comments on Suriname's progress in coming to terms with its troubled period of military dictatorship in the 1980s. The editorial appeared in Dagblad Suriname, a local daily with a circulation of 13,000, the day before President Venetiaan was to preside over a ceremony marking his government's compliance with a 2005 Inter-American Court on Human Rights ruling against the Government of Suriname. (See reftel) The judgment resulted from a case brought by a local human rights group, "Moiwana 86," formed in 1987 to seek justice for the gross and systematic human rights violations during the period of military rule, after successive Surinamese governments failed to respond to their requests to investigate and prosecute. The group took its name from a 1986 incident from Suriname's interior wars, when a national army unit massacred at least 39 residents of the N'Djuka village of Moiwana, located about 75 kilometers to the east of Paramaribo. It discusses the political sensitivities of dealing with a dark incident from Suriname's history, as the key figures from the opposing sides of the 1980s interior wars, Desi Bouterse and Ronnie Brunswijk, sit as political leaders in today's parliament. In congratulating the GOS for so doing, it enjoins it to move forward next with the December murders trial against among others Bouterse. END SUMMARY

2) (U) BEGIN TEXT OF EDITORIAL

Apologizing Publicly is No Humiliation

It is to the credit of this Government to execute the judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of June 15, 2005. The Government is working on executing the various parts of the judgment, but already there have been complaints about the slow pace at which the Government is moving. The Court found Suriname in violation of six articles of the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights; this puts Suriname in a bad light, but also reflects badly on the Surinamese people. It is a good thing that human rights violations are condemned in the world of today.

The Court's judgment costs our country millions of dollars (an estimated 5 million USD), money that we could have used for the development of Suriname. Besides the public apology

to the community of the N'Djuka village, the State was ordered to pay a total amount of US\$ 1,690,000 to the victims; the 130 survivors will receive compensation for material and moral damages. A fund of US\$ 1.2 million has to be established for community development of the N'Djuka village. The Government also has to investigate the massacre and prosecute the responsible persons.

What is very strange about this situation is that those responsible or at least those with a main role in the massacre are currently members of the Parliament. Two main figures: Brunswijk and Bouterse are very popular in Suriname and are respectively, the Political leaders of A-Combination and the National Democratic Party, parties which have 20 of the 51 seats in Parliament. A-Combination, which has 5 seats, is currently in the ruling coalition. Up to now, nothing has been said about the investigation of the Moiwana massacre, indeed a very sensitive issue in politics in Suriname.

On July 15, the President will publicly apologize on behalf of Suriname to the Moiwana community for the killings by a unit of the National Army on 29 November 1986. The man who was the military commander during that period is currently the Political leader of the NDP, the biggest political party in Suriname, and was chosen by the people to represent them in the Parliament. What a dilemma for the President. He cannot invite the two to join him on July 15 when he will be in the Moiwana village. The internationally motivated judgment came about because consecutive governments did not investigate what exactly transpired on November 29, 1986 and who was responsible for killing the innocent villagers. And still we are being very careful. The constitutional state is recovering, but is still very fragile. The current Minister of Justice and Police and the Attorney General lead this process of recovery, and we should not underestimate the load on their shoulders especially if we take into account the counter forces.

Executing the judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights will place Suriname in the category of countries that deal with their troubled past. Executing the judgment shows

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that Suriname respects human rights. It is of course very sad that local human rights NGOs, assisted by international NGOs, had to bring this case to an international forum. They had to do this, as over the 18-20 years since the killings, local efforts to move the Government to investigate the killings did not lead to prosecution of the perpetrators and compensation of the villagers for damages.

The human rights organizations also have to be complimented for their effort and their drive. They brought forward this case and were successful in the end. This case shows that local groups can be successful in pressuring the Government and it also shows that international treaties have to be observed. If a country wants to be part of the international community, it has to comply with international standards. Treaties can't just be signed, but the citizens should also be educated so they know the obligations the state has as the result of the treaty. How many Surinamese know the articles of the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights?

The public ceremony on Saturday should be seen as a cleansing ceremony for the Surinamese people and a warning for people who violate human rights in the Republic Suriname. The next step is that the State should bring clarity in the December murders of 1982, because in that case there are also families who suffered psychologically, morally and materially.

END TEXT OF EDITORIAL

13. (U) In the event, Venetiaan went, and offered the apology required by the court ruling, while stressing his current

government was unimplicated. Desi and Ronnie did not attend, although Brunswijk was present at the second ceremony at the actual massacre site. This thoughtful piece captures both the importance and the difficulty of resolving the echoes of a difficult period in Suriname's history.

BARNES